

Memorandum

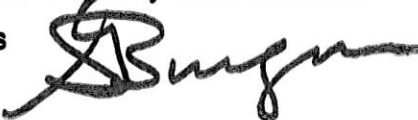
MIAMI-DADE
COUNTY

Date: February 5, 2008

Agenda Item No. 12(B)1

To: Honorable Bruno A. Barreiro, Chairperson
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

From: George M. Burgess
County Manager



Subject: Report on the Feasibility of Consolidating Municipal Elections

This information is provided in response to Resolution R-1135-07 adopted by the Board of County Commissioners on October 2, 2007, requesting the feasibility and advisability of consolidating municipal elections onto one day or conducting municipal elections in conjunction with countywide elections. The Elections Department was charged with reviewing the current elections calendar and identifying whether the consolidation of municipal elections would result in a more efficient use of public resources and higher voter participation.

This is a topic that the Supervisor of Elections had previously discussed with my staff as it was believed that a consolidation was beneficial from both an operational standpoint as well as for the voters of Miami-Dade County. Upon passage of R-1135-07, a more comprehensive review of this issue was undertaken, and it was found that ***the consolidation of municipal elections is both feasible and desirable***. However, municipal charter amendments will be necessary in order to move election dates, thus cooperation from each municipality will be necessary.

Background

Miami-Dade is the only county in the State of Florida with an unconsolidated elections calendar. Each of the County's 35 municipalities' election dates is set by the municipality's charter without input from the County. Currently, their elections take place on various dates throughout both even and odd years. There are only a handful of municipalities that share the same date. Other counties require municipalities to hold their elections in conjunction with each other. For example, Broward County's municipal elections are consolidated and held on the same day in either February or March in odd years and in March in even years. Palm Beach County's municipal elections are consolidated and held on the same day in March in odd years with no municipal elections in even years. In vast comparison, the Miami-Dade Elections Department conducts approximately 30 elections per year. In 2007, July was the only month in which an election did not take place.

Consolidating municipal elections in Miami-Dade County is both feasible and desirable, and can be accomplished in two ways - consolidating onto one day not in conjunction with a countywide election or consolidating in conjunction with a countywide election. Both scenarios will result in a cost savings to the municipality for services provided by the Elections Department and a cost savings to the County for Elections personnel. Of most importance is the increased voter participation that will be realized, which is a direct benefit to both the municipalities and the County. It is too common that important local issues are decided upon by a small minority of the electorate. Even if the municipal races or issues are impacted as a result of their placement towards the end of the ballot, the number of voters deciding an issue will be significantly higher than in "stand-alone" elections.

There are three scenarios for conducting a municipal election:

Option 1: Stand-alone election

In this option, the election date is unique to the municipality. The costs incurred by each municipality to hold a stand-alone election are the actual costs incurred by the Elections Department. One hundred percent of the costs associated with election-related services such as ballot programming,

translation, printing, tabulation, equipment delivery, poll worker pay and overtime costs are passed onto the municipality in this scenario.

Option 2: Consolidated, not in conjunction with a countywide election

Municipalities share the same election date, which is different from a countywide election date. The costs incurred by each municipality to hold its election on the same day is significantly reduced because the costs stated above are divided among the municipalities and are calculated by using the municipality's percentage of total registered voters.

Option 3: Consolidated, and in conjunction with a countywide election

Municipalities share the same election date as a countywide election. The cost incurred by each municipality to hold its election in conjunction with a countywide election is most dramatically reduced because the County is responsible for the costs associated with that election. The municipalities incur minimal costs associated with ballot programming, translation, and ballot printing only. All other costs are absorbed by the Elections Department.

Table 1 (attached) shows the cost comparison of the three scenarios stated above. Not included in Table 1 is the cost for Early Voting. Should a municipality opt to offer Early Voting during option 1 or 2, the cost would be increased accordingly. In contrast, municipalities can offer Early Voting at no additional cost when held in conjunction with a countywide election (option 3), should the municipality utilize the County's 20 predetermined Early Voting locations. This is a service already offered and paid for by the County.

The municipalities denoted with an asterisk will only realize a cost savings if their elections are consolidated onto a countywide election (option 3). This is due to the formula used to calculate election costs, which is based on the number of registered voters in each municipality. For instance, these cities may not require additional support such as truck rental and seasonal personnel costs during their stand alone election. However, in a consolidated election, not in conjunction with a countywide election (option 2), this support is required and these additional costs are divided among all the participating municipalities. These municipalities would still realize a benefit from joining a consolidated calendar because of the higher voter participation. While the cost associated with conducting the election is higher, the actual cost per voter is less.

The County will also benefit from a consolidated elections schedule. A cost savings will be realized as the only cost not passed onto municipalities for conducting their elections is for personnel during regular County office hours. Currently, seasonal staff must be hired for varying intervals throughout the year in order to conduct the numerous stand-alone elections. If the elections calendar is consolidated, the number of staff needed and duration of their employment will be significantly reduced. Subsequently, the Elections Department personnel budget would be reduced accordingly. This approach makes sense from an operational and logistical perspective. While the department is accustomed to conducting various elections, continuing to hold elections in this manner will become more complex due to the recent mandate to convert to optical scan technology. The planning and preparation that is required to hold an election will be more extensive and will require additional time to print paper ballots. This will become extremely challenging considering the short time frames between currently scheduled elections.

The increase in voter turnout that will result from a consolidated elections calendar is another compelling factor. Historically, municipalities holding elections in conjunction with countywide elections experience higher turnout. The successful experiences of our neighboring counties, as well as those across the country, prove the same will occur in Miami-Dade County. There are many instances within our county where these results repeatedly occur. This is apparent from looking at voter turnout in 2006. Table 2 (attached) shows the comparison of voter turnout in stand-alone elections versus countywide elections that contained municipal question(s) only months apart.

This increase can be attributed to several factors. First, voters typically know when countywide elections are being held due to the wide-spread media attention inherent in large elections. In addition, the Elections Department launches its own awareness campaigns via television, radio, and newspaper and holds hundreds of outreach events throughout the community. These are opportunities that municipalities can benefit from should their elections occur on the same date. Having a single election date for all municipalities will allow for enhanced media exposure. The County and municipalities can spend advertising dollars on a single, shared election date, resulting in a much farther reaching audience and therefore contributing to higher turnout. Should the municipalities piggyback onto a countywide election, voters will only have to remember major election dates thereby increasing the likelihood of their participation. Granting voters the ability to vote on all issues, both local and beyond at once, will further ensure their voices will be heard on all important issues. I understand, however, that there are instances when a stand-alone election is not only required, but prudent. There are times when a municipality needs to place an issue or other item on the ballot for consideration by their residents and a stand-alone election is the best approach. The Elections Department will certainly accommodate municipalities in cases such as this.

Even with these benefits to both government and our voters, cooperation from the municipalities is necessary to consolidate the elections schedule. Buy-in from each municipality is essential as charter amendments will be required in order to move its election dates. Some municipalities will also require amendments to candidate qualifying dates and potentially term limits. The Elections Department is currently in discussions with the municipal clerks to gain support for this essential consolidation. The City of Aventura has seen the value in consolidating and has agreed to pass a resolution in early 2008 moving its municipal election to coincide with the Miami-Dade General Election beginning in 2010.

The most mutually beneficial approach is for municipalities to hold consolidated elections in August and November during odd years, and in conjunction with the Primary and General Elections in even years. Each municipality can determine which interval best suits their city and its residents as making a change such as this may require an extension of term limits for certain offices during the transition to the new schedule. Those municipalities choosing to consolidate on even number years will draw the additional cost benefits inherent with piggybacking onto the countywide elections. Those cities choosing to consolidate on odd number years will also realize a cost savings, albeit less. All municipalities will be afforded the other benefits stated above.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of County Commissioners adopt legislation urging municipal officials to sponsor their own legislation in support of a consolidated elections calendar. The Elections Department will be available to assist municipalities with the creation of such legislation. In order to provide ample time for the municipalities to make the necessary arrangements, the consolidated elections calendar should be promoted to have a 2010 effective date.

Municipalities would not only benefit from the cost savings of consolidating election-related services, it would also allow the election process to function more efficiently. In addition to the cost benefits to government, the residents of Miami-Dade County will undoubtedly benefit from this change as voter turnout would invariably be increased.


Assistant County Manager

Estimated Municipal Election Costs

Table 1

Municipalities	Number of Registered Voters	Stand Alone (Option 1)	Same Day-not with a Countywide (Option 2)	Same Day - In Conjunction with a Countywide (Option 3)
City of Aventura*	15,657	64,255	76,507	6,415
Village of Bal Harbour	1,484	17,670	7,251	4,116
Town of Bay Harbour Islands	2,469	19,222	12,065	4,929
Village of Biscayne Park	1,733	17,984	8,468	4,322
City of Coral Gables	26,326	139,876	128,640	8,815
Town of Cutler Bay	18,351	-	-	7,021
City of Doral	10,531	53,007	51,459	5,261
Village of El Portal	1,510	17,384	7,378	4,138
City of Florida City	3,583	30,772	17,508	4,558
Town of Golden Beach	565	15,531	2,761	3,358
City of Hialeah*	77,469	331,694	378,546	20,323
City of Hialeah Gardens*	7,400	32,787	36,159	5,001
City of Homestead*	14,190	67,183	69,338	6,085
Village of Indian Creek	34	14,900	166	2,920
City of Islandia	6	14,863	266	2,897
Village of Key Biscayne*	5,773	25,715	28,209	4,884
Town of Medley	482	15,561	2,355	3,290
City of Miami*	146,160	702,321	714,199	35,778
City of Miami Beach	38,889	192,468	190,028	11,642
City of Miami Gardens*	59,649	282,301	291,470	16,313
Town of Miami Lakes*	14,387	63,423	70,301	6,129
City of Miami Shores*	6,241	26,685	30,496	5,045
City of Miami Springs*	7,381	28,348	36,067	4,996
City of North Bay Village	2,106	23,374	10,291	4,629
City of North Miami	23,792	122,937	116,258	8,245
City of North Miami Beach*	17,466	81,579	85,346	6,822
City of Opa-Locka	6,481	50,887	31,669	4,739
Village of Palmetto Bay	14,456	81,008	70,638	6,145
Village of Pinecrest	11,377	71,078	55,593	5,452
City of South Miami*	6,435	27,162	31,444	4,726
City of Sunny Isles Beach	7,799	48,236	38,109	5,115
Town of Surfside	2,949	20,205	14,410	5,325
City of Sweetwater	4,887	29,099	23,880	5,164
Village of Virginia Gardens	1,188	17,037	5,805	3,872
City of West Miami	2,963	20,359	14,478	5,336
Totals	562,169	\$2,766,912	\$2,657,558	\$243,806
*These municipalities will only realize a cost savings if elections are consolidated onto a countywide election due to the formula used to calculate costs.				

Percentage of Voter Turnout for Municipal vs Countywide Elections In 2006
Table 2

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>Stand Alone Election</u>	<u>Percentage of Voter Turnout</u>	<u>Countywide Election Containing Municipal Question(s)</u>	<u>Percentage of Voter Turnout</u>
Cutler Bay	General Election (1/10/2006)	14.01%	Miami-Dade County Primary Election (09/05/2006)	14.16%
Doral	Special Election (1/24/2006)	4.50%	Miami-Dade County General Election (11/07/2006)	27.83%
Key Biscayne	Special Election (4/11/2006)	29.05%	Miami-Dade County General Election (11/07/2006)	46.32%
Opa-locka	Special & Municipal Election (4/25/2006)	3.44%	Miami-Dade County General Election (11/07/2006)	26.74%
Palmetto Bay	Run-Off Election (10/03/2006)	14.14%	Miami-Dade County Primary Election (09/05/2006)	23.66%
El Portal	Run-Off Election (11/21/2006)	30.63%	Miami-Dade County General Election (11/07/2006)	44.34%
Miami Beach	Run-Off Election (11/21/2006)	9.73%	Miami-Dade County General Election (11/07/2006)	32.87%